DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 266 754 HE 019 138

AUTHOR Heaman, Robert J.
TITLE A Matter of Trust: The Turnabout at Wilkes College.
PUB DATE Aug 85
NOTE 11p.
PUB TYPE Collected Works - Serials (022) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Core Curriculum; *Curriculum Development; *Declining Enrollment; Departments; Educational Change; Faculty College Relationship; Faculty Development; *Faculty Evaluation; Higher Education; *Nontenured Faculty; Participative Decision Making; Problem Solving; Small Colleges; Teacher Administrator Relationship; *Tenured Faculty
IDENTIFIERS *Institutional Mission; Post Tenure Review; Program Discontinuance; *Wilkes College PA

ABSTRACT

Difficulties experienced by Wilkes College (Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania) as a result of declining enrollments and shifts in student majors, and the resolution of differences between the administration and the faculty, are described in an essay. Related revision of institutional mission and peer-evaluation procedures are also discussed in an article from "The Chronicle of Higher Education." Changes in both enrollments and students' fields of study created an imbalance in the tenure profile. An impasse developed about a proposed new policy: reducing the size of a given department without discontinuing the department and without the college declaring financial exigency. Before this policy was instituted, the administration proposed to the faculty the idea of periodic review of all tenured and nontenured faculty that would enable faculty to evaluate their own careers and to determine where they wanted to be in 5 years, as well as the support they would need. Since students may change careers several times in their lives, the need for curriculum reform was also recognized. Faculty development was seen as important to redefining the mission and revitalizing the curriculum. A grant to the college made possible a faculty retreat to plan revision of the core curriculum, review of academic departments, and the process of individual faculty development and evaluation. (SW)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED266754

A Matter of Trust: The Turnabout at Wilkes College

"See what people can accomplish when they work together."

Christopher N. Breiseth, 4th President of Wilkes College, upon hearing the performance of "Emerald Blue" for Wind Ensemble and Chorus by Wilkes College Students at his Inauguration; written by Bruce Reprich of Wilkes College for the Inauguration.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Robert J Heaman

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Robert J. Heaman, Ph.D.
Associate Dean, Academic Affairs

August, 1985

HE019138

Wilkes College, a small, private, non-denominational college with a traditional liberal arts heritage, began to suffer from the declining enrollments common to many small colleges in the 1970's. A reduced enrollment, coupled with a student interest shift to the professional areas, was creating an imbalance in the tenure profile of the College in the late 1970's. Although faculty, administration, and trustees worked together to study the tenure situation, the College arrived at an impasse in the early 1980's. Agreement was reached on all but one aspect of the new policy; in the end, the Board of Trustees came to the reluctant conclusion that the College has the right to reduce the size of a given department without discontinuing the department and without the College having declared financial exigency. This stipulation, passed by the Board on December 11, 1981, was to go into effect three years from that date. Members of the faculty responded by seeking legal advice, forming a faculty association, and exploring the possibility of creating a faculty union.

During the period of moratorium, the College continued to conduct business as usual. Although there continued to be a deep sense of frustration among members of the Board and the faculty with their inability to resolve their difference regarding the tenure issue, the enrollment seemed to be stabilizing, the various constituencies of the College were attempting to work together congenially, and the endowment was improving modestly. In January, 1983, however, for reasons unrelated to the difficult tenure situation at Wilkes, the President of the College announced his intention to retire in June, 1984. When a presidential search committee was formed, a prime consideration of the committee was how the new President would address this stalemate between the faculty and the trustees, a stalemate that was likely to be tested within six months of his assuming office since the Board's moratorium was scheduled to expire in December of 1984.

In working together for a common goal — the selection of a new president — faculty and Board representatives on the search committee discovered that their differences were not as severe as had at first appeared. The new President, working from this line of communication, argued that if faculty could demonstrate to the Board their willingness to be accountable, their eagerness to remain vital, and their capacity to adjust to new market demands, he could eventually ask the Board to reconsider and, perhaps, to rescind its policy. In talking and working closely with members of his administration and with faculty leaders, the President came up with a tentative solution of the problem: if the faculty would agree in principle to a periodic evaluation system for all tentured and non-tenured faculty, the President could appeal to the Board to extend the moratorium for another year while the faculty and administration worked together to explore creative options to the dilemma. The President presented the idea of linking periodic review with faculty development to groups of faculty leaders early in the fall semester.

In November, the College sent a faculty representative to the American Council on Education conference on post-tenure evaluation. Here the faculty representative learned that the administration was pursuing precisely the strategy necessary to make post-tenure evaluation successful: it had turned the initiative over to faculty so that the process was in control of faculty; it was allowing faculty to define its own policy; and it was tying post-tenure evaluation to faculty development. The President and the Dean of Academic Affairs had been working closely with faculty, getting their perspective on the possibility of a review system, and discussing the whole issue in a positive context, a context of renewal and reinvigoration.

On December 6, 1984, the President offered a proposal at the faculty meeting to accept, in principle, the periodic review of all faculty. The faculty responded

to the positive nature of the approach by voting overwhelmingly in support of the proposal (there were only two negative votes). The President was able to take this mandate to the trustees at their meeting on December 7 and received an agreement for a one-year extension of the moratorium.

The President and the Dean of Academic Affairs then appointed a committee from a group of volunteer faculty to study the faculty review process. This Faculty Development/Evaluation Committee met daily over the winter intersession and came up with a draft proposal of a five-year faculty review process to present to an open forum of the faculty immediately before the beginning of the spring semester. A sizable majority fo the faculty turned out and, in general, gave solid support to the draft proposal. After three more drafts, the proposal for a five-year review of all faculty was unanimously accepted at the March faculty meeting (there were four abstentions).

The five-year review calls for one-fifth of the faculty to be evaluated by a team of three peers every five years. The evaluation involves frank and open discussion of the faculty person's strengths and weaknesses, goals and aspirations, frustrations and sources of inspiration. The faculty evaluate themselves in relation to their own careers, their departments, their students, and the mission of the College. They try to determine where they are and where they want to be in five years and what kind of support they will need to achieve that long-range goal. After determining the legitimacy of his or her case, the team acts as an advocacy group in support of the faculty member and writes a proposal to a Faculty Development Overview Committee, an elected faculty committee, seeking the necessary support.

While the President had been gaining faculty receptiveness to a review plan, he was also working with key members of the administration and faculty

leaders to develop a grant proposal that would enable the College to embark on the faculty development program with real and substantial support. At the same time a Mission Task Force, headed by the Dean of Academic Affairs and representing all of the College constituencies, had set about to describe the precise nature of the College's mission so that it could balance its professional and traditional liberal arts programs and create a curriculum that would best serve its students. On the basis of the findings of the Mission Task Force, the grant proposal argued for the need to undertake a major curricular revision and to strengthen the undergraduate program through an all-college process of faculty evaluation and faculty development.

The Mission Task Force recognized the necessity for curricular reform that would meet the needs of students who may be changing careers four or five times in their professional lives. In the past, many of the College's introductory and core courses had been designed to introduce students to a major field of study. Now, particularly in cases of those students who elect professional concentrations in the upper division, students would be seeking core courses very often as their only exposure to those disciplines; faculty would, therefore, have to structure those core offerings in such a way that the introductory experience would be integral, meaningful, and lasting. Faculty would have to find ways of relating those courses to one another so that students would see their educational experience as coherent and significant. In order for this curricular reform to have its intended effect, faculty themselves would have to develop in creative and flexible directions.

The grant proposal presented evidence of the faculty's willingness to develop creatively in order to meet the challenge of the curricular reform: this had been demonstrated by the overwhelming faculty support of the five-year review plan. The College needed to be in a position to support the faculty in developing skills

and resources that would allow faculty to contribute in vital ways to the redefined mission of the institution and to the issues being raised by the national reports on higher education. The College intended to revitalize its curriculum with the faculty currently at Wilkes; it would need substantial support to do so.

The new President's inauguration was scheduled for April 14. Wilkes was delighted to have as the main speaker at the inauguration Fred Rudolph, who put the findings and conclusions of the Association of American Colleges' report, Integrity in College Curriculum, into its final form. It seemed appropriate that Professor Rudolph should be speaking at an institution that was so sensitively attuned to the recommendations of this report. The faculty had passed the five-year review plan in March; the Board of the Pew Memorial Trust was meeting in April to consider Wilkes' faculty development grant proposal, a proposal that addressed directly the issues raised by the AAC report. At his inauguration the new President was able to announce that he learned on Friday, April 12, that the Pew Memorial Trust had approved a faculty development grant of $300,000 to Wilkes College to be used over the next three years, with an invitation to reapply for a fourth and fifth year. The timing for this series of events was almost as close as that between the faculty's acceptance in principle on December 6 of a proposal that was to go to the Board of Trustees on December 7.

One wonders about the drama of such events, but in truth it was precisely the timing that was crucial. The Pew Memorial Trust must have been impressed by the faculty's willingness to respond creatively to its challenge and to demonstrate its accountability, by the College's having redefined its mission, and by the demonstrated capacity of constituencies to work together; and it must have been impressed by the timeliness of the endeavor — national reports on higher education were addressing precisely these issues — and even the fact that it all could have

been done in such a short period of time. Of course Pew felt that the enterprise deserved that support. Of course the whole plan was dependent upon money that was not there, and of course the money could not be forthcoming unless there was a plan that demonstrated that the money deserved to be there. And so the faith that had been absent in the relationship between the Wilkes faculty and its trustees was now discovered and recognized by the Pew Memorial Trust. The irony of language becomes almost as dramatic as the timing in the telling of this tale.

One of the first things the College will do with the Pew money will be to hold a faculty retreat over Labor Day weekend. There will be an outside speaker on the recent national reports in higher education and their relationship to Wilkes' mission, a speaker on national trends in faculty development and how they relate to what is going on at Wilkes. Wilkes will start planning workshops and seminars on revising its core over the next year, will begin curricular review of academic departments, and will start the process for individual faculty development and evaluation.

If what has happened over the past year is a fair indication, Wilkes should be able to realize its goals. The faculty has demonstrated its eagerness to work together. They approved the creation of a core committee to study the core offerings and a process for individual faculty to introduce interdisciplinary courses outside the traditional departmental structure. Faculty were willing to give up their time over intersession to work on the periodic review process, to meet on Friday mornings at 7:45 to discuss mission, and to meet during the summer to plan strategy for a retreat, for the periodic evaluation, and for the study of the core. Faculty took the initiative in producing the 150-page Periodic Review for Middle States, a task the Academic Dean could not have been able to assume while attending to so many other pressing activities. Faculty volunteered to go

through the faculty evaluation on a trial basis in the spring of 1985, and many of those who were presented with the option of being evaluated this year or postponing their evaluation until after their tenure process had run its course elected to be evaluated early. "They see the process as exciting and they want to get involved," according to the Academic Dean. This indication of trust and good will is encouraging.

Wilkes has come a long way from where it was a short year ago: from a wary, suspicious, uneasy alliance between faculty and trustees to a place where faculty and administration, students, alumni, and trustees have worked together to define the mission of the College, to institute a periodic evaluation system for all faculty and draw up a grant proposal in support of this, and to accept and even to anticipate the challenges higher education will be faced with in the 1990's. What began as a faculty's potential retreat from the larger college enterprise into a protection of its vested rights has ended with a Faculty Retreat celebrating the challenges of higher education. Wilkes is not thinking now in terms of survivability of tenured faculty or of the College itself; it is coming to see itself as one small college that, in solving its problems as a team, can "create a collegial climate for learning. . . second to none," to quote from the new President's inaugural speech. Wilkes may well be able to set a model for how higher education will have to address its challenges in the next century. The key ingredient will obviously be working together.

THE CHRONICLE
of Higher Education.
September 18, 1985 • $1.75
Volume XXXI, Number 3

Retreat for the Faculty Brings 'a Moment of Truth and Elevation' to Wilkes College

On the agenda: peer-evaluation procedures and revised mission statement for the college

By SCOTT HELLER

LA PLUME, PA.

When he assumed the presidency of Wilkes College more than a year ago, Christopher N. Breiseth "didn't feel the faculty knew each other."

Faculty meetings were sparsely attended, with the same people saying the same things to each other month after month. Morale among the college's 150 professors was obviously low.

"Departments had become free-standing organizations on their own, and the incentive to work together was minimal," the president says. "We had not been as collegial around here as we needed to be."

"I began looking at ways to knit faculty together," he adds. "Everything we could do to get people to feel they were part of a single collegial environment was a plus."

Mr. Breiseth's year of effort was capped over the Labor Day weekend, as all but a handful of Wilkes professors found themselves more together—even cramped—than they might have ever expected.

Pillows and alarm clocks in hand, they drove 40 miles from Wilkes-Barre for the college's first overnight faculty retreat, held at Keystone Junior College.

Roommates doubled up in the college's cinder-block dorm rooms and ate beef turnovers and chocolate pudding in the school cafeteria. Engineering professors stayed up long into the night, discussing curricular changes over wine and cheese. Faculty members from different departments met for the first time, noting new faces in speckled bathroom mirrors as they washed up in the morning.

Break Down Lines of Authority

The agenda was also filled with discussion of faculty development, peer-evaluation procedures, and the national move toward curricular reform.

"I can't think of a better atmosphere than this for working together to synthesize our knowledge," said Robert J. Heaman, an associate professor of English, who coordinated the event.

Retreats "break down linear lines of authority and allow for creative planning, which a day-to-day set-up does not," said William H. Bergquist, president of the Academy for Professional Development, which organizes workshops and other events designed to enhance professors' work lives.

Colleges and universities used retreats frequently during the boom in faculty development in the 1960's and early 1970's. Many grew disillusioned with the technique when it didn't seem to help over the long haul, he added.

Although dollars are now tight, some colleges, universities, and educational consortia are again taking their employees off their campuses to discuss long-term planning.

The difference is that retreats today are more goal-oriented, "with a strong notion of follow-up," Mr. Bergquist said. Discussion is centered on common readings and other documents, and outside speakers are often brought in to lead the proceedings.

The overnight stay for Wilkes professors fit that description. Faculty members were asked to peruse the three national reports on the college curriculum released during the last academic year, as well as a draft of a revised mission statement for the 52-year-old college, which has suffered flagging enrollments over several years.

Frances D. Fergusson, vice-president for academic affairs at Bucknell University, attempted to put the national reports in perspective for Wilkes, a college that "can proudly consider itself untouched by many of the charges leveled at the professoriate."

John F. Noonan, dean of the school of arts and sciences at Iona College, told the assembly about national trends in faculty development. He urged the college's professors to take responsibility for the changes in their careers and the curriculum.

"The kind of leadership faculty members need is the kind that makes them feel empowered, not directed," he said.

For the most part, though, professors weren't talked at. Rather, they talked to each other.

This spring, Wilkes received a three-year, $300,000 faculty-development grant from the J. N. Pew Trust to "prepare for the 1990's and beyond."

Besides covering the costs of the retreat, the money will be used to establish peer-evaluation procedures for all faculty members.

In addition, it will aid professors in developing interdisciplinary and other courses relating to the college's new mission statement, a project that was undertaken soon after Mr. Breiseth became president.

"So much happened here in the last year I don't even think faculty realize how much they accomplished. This retreat is a chance to recapitulate how much has gotten done, and to build momentum as we move into the new year," explained Gerald E. Hartdagen, dean of academic affairs.

Central to the college's plan is the evaluation process for both tenured and non-tenured faculty members. Professors will be evaluated once every five years, with 30 members scheduled this academic year.

"Through creative arrangements, we can revitalize the faculty here."

Those being evaluated are expected to provide materials and recommendations explaining what they've done at the college. They will also prepare a "self-assessment essay" describing their short-term and long-term goals, and what they would need—in money, release time, or other things—to realize their intentions.

Using all that as a guide, an evalua-

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

tion team made up of three professors will prepare a report on the faculty member, which will be passed on to his or her department chairman, as well as to the dean of faculty.

"The main purpose is to make nontenured faculty members realize where their weaknesses are and allow them a better chance to get tenure," Mr. Hartdagen said.

Along with grant money for retraining and course development, the process will allow Wilkes to "find ways to utilize faculty" in disciplines with declining enrollment, he added. "Through creative structural arrangements, we can revitalize the faculty here."

Many professors hope that, as a result of this evaluation process, the trustees will not implement a proposed tenure code that clashes with the American Association of University Professors' guidelines for retrenchment procedures.

Four faculty members who were evaluated on a trial basis last semester presented their impressions of the process to an eager and interested audience at the retreat.

Kenneth M. Klemow, assistant professor of biology, warned that the procedure would take longer than professors might expect.

Mr. Klemow, who wrote an 18-page essay on his plans and submitted copies of syllabi, exams, and a botany lab manual as supporting evidence, nevertheless praised the procedure.

"I absolutely, positively do not begrudge the time spent," he said.

Bruce W. Brown, professor of sociology, testified to how evaluation allows professors to vent their frustrations as they plan ahead.

"Many of us are walking around with an amorphous sort of dissatisfaction with our lives at Wilkes," he said. This "can allow us to have a class consciousness as a faculty—to identify what is wrong and how it can change, to develop some camaraderie."

"For this process to work," Mr. Brown added, "it means a change in the mindset of us as a faculty. We have to allow ourselves to share our professional selves with each other, to be less guarded. If not, we will circumvent this faculty-development and evaluation procedure."

The liveliest discussion of the two days here came when the college's administrators asked faculty members to meet in small groups and examine a one-page synopsis of the institution's new mission statement.

Its eight paragraphs were dissected for nearly two hours—and the lack of agreement on basic assertions was striking.

In the small groups, questions came fast and furious. Is Wilkes "small"? Is it "private" or "independent"? Is it an "undergraduate college"?

All that was over the first sentence.

In other discussions, professors questioned whether the college was being overblown in descriptions of its "outstanding" programs.

"We're constantly belittling what we are," Dean Hartdagen replied. "Is it really wrong to put these strong adjectives in there?"

More controversial was a description of Wilkes as providing "quality education for students with widely varying preparation for college work."

Many faculty members felt this was a euphemism for an open-door admissions policy, and doomed the college to attracting only mediocre students.

Others, including Mr. Breiseth, pointed out that "if we drop that phrase out, we're not going to communicate in any way that we're especially good with students who need help."

Eventually, faculty members agreed to retain the sentiment, but to eliminate "widely" from the sentence.

The two days spent in discussing wording and committee structures left some participants weary, despite the nippy mountain air.

"I'd give it a C+," Frank B. Leib, assistant professor of English, said about the retreat. "In general, there were too many academic clichés around, and too little substance. There was hot air—but commendable hot air. And with what's been happening here in the last few years, that is quite an improvement."

Many participants left concerned about the relationship between the five-year evaluations and the tenure-and-promotion process, about which no conclusion was reached.

Mr. Breiseth announced near the retreat's end that that issue would have to be discussed when faculty members returned to campus.

Although Ms. Fergusson and Mr. Noonan implored faculty members to get beyond "turfism," disagreement was obvious between science and engineering professors and their colleagues in the humanities.

The call for more interdisciplinary work and fewer specialized courses was questioned by many professors, who said that students wanted coursework that would help them get jobs.

A mathematics professor who has begun retraining in computer science was apprehensive about what might be asked of faculty in the future. "If I'm asked to learn to teach writing across the curriculum, history across the curriculum, and so on, I'm honestly afraid I'll be retired before I have the expertise to teach," said Richard E. Sours.

Nevertheless, while the overnight stay brought out differences of opinion, those who attended were enthusiastic about the chance to argue in a new setting. Many indicated in a post-meeting survey that they hoped for similar events annually.

"A skeptic like me expected this to amount to nothing," said Walter A. Placek, assistant professor of physics, at the close of the event. "In fact, I told my wife I'd be back by noon."

"I learned that I share with people from other departments many of the aspirations of the college that I thought were unique to me and to people in the sciences," he added.

"Some of it is a heightened euphoria, but I think the effects will outlive the retreat, obviously in reduced form," said Norma M. Schulman, assistant professor of English and communications. "The sense of options is something that was missing from this place. The sense that we can be architects of our own destiny, within limits, is exhilarating in its way."

For Mr. Breiseth, who called the event "a moment of truth and elevation for Wilkes College," the effort didn't stop at retreat's end.

Last weekend he brought the revised mission statement to the board of trustees for approval, and outlined for them how Wilkes's faculty members were taking responsibility for their careers.

Where did Mr. Breiseth tell his story? At a retreat, of course—in a resort in the Pocono Mountains.

J. B. Kahl

Frances Fergusson (left) of Bucknell talks with Wilkes's President Christopher Breiseth (foreground) and Dean Gerald Hartdagen.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE